

Message Text

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PAGE 01 BEIRUT 00630 151810Z

43

ACTION NEA-09

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 NEAE-00 CIAE-00 PM-03 H-01 INR-07 L-02

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P R 151720Z JAN 75

FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 2342

DIA WASHDC PRIORITY

INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN

AMEMBASSY CAIRO

AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

AMCONSUL JERUSALEM

AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV PRIORITY

USCINCEUR

C O N F I D E N T I A L BEIRUT 630

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINS PFOR LE IS

SUBJECT: DETERIORATING SITUATION IN LEBANON

REF: USDAO BEIRUT 46

SUMMARY: EVER-ESCALATING HOSTILITIES ALONG LEBANESE-ISRAELI BORDER PROMISE TO CONFRONT GOL MORE STARKLY THAN EVER WITH TWO OPTIONS WHICH IT HAS LONG SOUGHT TO AVOID: (A) CONFRONTATION WITH FEDAYEEN, OR (B) UNDERGOING CONTINUED, MORE WIDER-RANGING REPRISALS FROM ISRAEL. EITHER OPTION COULD PLACE UNBEARABLE STRAINS ON THIS COUNTRY'S ABILITY TO MAINTAIN DOMESTIC ORDER AND PERHAPS EVEN TO SURVIVE AS AN INDEPENDENT, SOVEREIGN STATE. END SUMMARY.

1. WE NOTE THAT PLO (WAFA) PROPAGANDA APPARATUS IS CRANKING OUT REPORTS OF CONTINUED FIGHTING BETWEEN FEDAYEEN AND IDF IN KFAR SHUBA AREA OF ARQOUB, REplete WITH CLAIMS OF HEAVY ISRAELI CASUALTIES INFLICTED IN COURSE OF ADDITIONAL IDF "PENETRATIONS"

CONFIDENTIAL

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PAGE 02 BEIRUT 00630 151810Z

ON JAN 14. NONE OF THIS HAS BEEN CONFIRMED BY LEBANESE ARMY

OR OTHER RELIABLE SOURCES, ALTHOUGH LATTER REPORT THAT ISRAELI SHELLING OF TARGETS IN ARQOUB JAN 14 WAS EXCEPTIONALLY INTENSE, WITH AT LEAST 200 (AND PROBABLY CONSIDERABLY MORE) ROUNDS HAVING BEEN RECEIVED DURING COURSE OF DAY. AT SAME TIME, ISRAELI RECONNAISSANCE FLIGHTS OVER LEBANESE TERRITORY CONTINUE, WITH PARTICULARLY LOUD SONIC BOOMS HEARD IN BEIRUT JAN 14 AND MID-MORNING JAN 15.

2. LOCAL PRESS JAN 15 ALSO REPRRTS THAT UGLY CONFRONTATION OCCURRED PREVIOUS DAY BETWEEN LEBANESE INTERNAL SECURITY FORCES (ISF) AND MOB OF IRATE SOUTHERN VILLAGERS IN SOUTHEASTERN TOWN OF MARJAYOUN. PAPERS CLAIM THAT CROWD TRIED TO OCCUPY DISTRICT COMMISSIONER'S OFFICE IN PROTEST AGAINST GOL'S FAILURE TO PROVIDE ADEQUATE PROTECTION AGAINST LATEST ISRAELI ATTACKS AND THAT ISF OPENED FIRE ON THEM, WOUNDING 12 PERSONS. (COMMENT: ALTHOUGH SOME SORT OF DEMONSTRATION DID OCCUR IN MARJAYOUN, WE GATHER THAT PRESS ACCOUNTS ARE WILDLY EXAGGERATED. GOVERNOR OF SOUTH LEBANON HAS STATED THAT ONLY ONE SHOT WAS FIRED--NOBODY KNOWS BY WHOM--AND THAT INJURIES SUSTAINED BY DEMONSTRATORS WERE CAUSED BY FLYING STONES AND SHATTERED GLASS. OTHER SOURCES, DRAWING ON EYE-WITNESS ACCOUNTS, SAY THAT BOTH MARJAYOUN DEMONSTRATION AND SUBSEQUENT INFLATED PRESS ACCOUNTS WERE INSTIGATED BY COMMUNIST, BAATHIST AND PRO-FEDAYEEN ELEMENTS SEEKING TO EMBARRASS AND BRING FUTHER PUBLIC PRESSURE TO BEAR ON GOL FOR FAILING TO JOIN FEDAYEEN IN "RESISTING" IDF ATTACKS.)

3. COMMENT: (A) WOULD APPEAR THAT PAST FEW DAYS HAVE WITNESSED SHIFT IN FEDAYEEN TACTICS ALSONG LEBANESE-ISRAELI BORDER, WITH COMMANDOS HAVING MOMENTARILY SUSPENDED INFILTRATION OPERATINS IN BORDER AREAS WEST OF ARQOUB IN FACOR OF HARASSING OPERATIONS (E.G., AMBUSHES, MINE-LAYING, ETC.) AGAINST IDF UNITS POSITIONED ON UPPER SLOPES AND RIDGES OF MT. HERMON. (DEPT WILL RECALL THAT SIMILAR TACTICS PROVOKED SERIES OF IDF RETALIATORY RAIDS IN ARQOUB AREA THROUGHOUT MUCH OF 1972.) PURPOSE OF THIS ACTIVITY SEEMS TO BE TO DRAW IDF OFF BALANCE AND, AS USUAL, GRAB ADDITIONAL HEADLINES FOR PLO'S ENDEAVOR TO CONVEY IMAGE OF "PROTECTING" LEBANESE SOIL AND CARRY ON ITS "ARMED STRUGGLE" AGAINST ISRAELI ENEMY.

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PAGE 03 BEIRUT 00630 151810Z

(B) FOREGOING IS FURTHER EVIDENCE OF DETERIORATING SITUATION IN SOUTH LEBANON. CAUGHT BETWEEN CONFLICTINGPRESSURES GENERATED BY ESCALATING FEDAYEEN PRESENCE AND ACTIVITY, ISRAELI MILITARY RETALIATION, SYRIAN ENCOURAGEMENT OF ENTRY INTO LEBANON OF ADDITIONAL SA'IQA AND PLA ELEMENTS, NEW SIGNS OF WIDESPREAD WRATH AMONG SOUTHERN INHABITANTS (SKILLFULLY MANIPULATED BY LEFTIST AND PRO-FEDAYEEN ELEMENTS AND DIRECTED INCREASINGLY AGAINST CENTRAL GOVT.), AND ITS OWN FEAR OF RISKING ANY ACTION THAT MIGHT

LEAD TO CONFRONTATION WITH FEDAYEEN, GOL SEEMS MORE HELPLESS THAN EVER TO EXERT ANY POSITIVE INFLUENCE OVER FUTURE COURSE OF EVENTS ALONG BORDER WITH ISRAEL. IN THESE CIRCUMSTANCES, CALLS BY ISRAELI OFFICIALS-- HOWEVER SYMPATHETIC OR WELL-MEANING (TEL AVIV 134)-- ON GOL TO "TELL TERRORISTS NOT TO OPERATE" OR EVEN TO BUILD ITS OWN PROTECTIVE "FENCE" ALONG BORDER STRIKE US AS HIGHLY UNREALISTIC. GIVEN UNMANAGEABLE FACTORS NOTED ABOVE, GOL WILL NOT RPT NOT DARE UNDERTAKE SUCH STEPS WITHOUT APPEARING TO ACT AS SURROGATE POLICEMAN FOR ISRAEL. FACED WITH ALMOST UNBEARABLE CHOICE BETWEEN (A) PROVOKING DOMESTIC CHAOS AND DESTRUCTIVE TURMOIL THAT WOULD ENSUE FROM ANOTHER CONFRONTATION WITH FEDAYEEN, AND (B) UNDERGOING CONTINUED AND POSSIBLY MORE WIDE-RANGING ISRAELI REPRISALS, WE BELIEVE GOL WOULD OPT (ALBEIT WITH MUCH DESPAIR) FOR ENDURING LATTER.

GODLEY

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